

CHAPTER II: LAND USE AND CHANGE IN PLACER COUNTY

This chapter examines population and economic development trends in the county and describes the role of Placer Legacy in this context.

In 1998, the State Department of Finance identified Placer County and San Benito County as the two fastest growing Counties in the State of California with a growth rate of 4.0%. The Department of Finance and other entities continue to project significant levels of growth in Placer County for years to come. The Placer Legacy program seeks to achieve a balance between the growth that is anticipated with conservation of the very resources that are bringing so many new residents and employees to the area. In order to determine how such a balance can be achieved, it is necessary to have an understanding of the status of land use in Placer County today and the changes that are being contemplated for the future.

SECTION A: Population Trends

In 1967, the Board of Supervisors adopted the first General Plan for Placer County. Compared to similar plans prepared today throughout California, the plan provides little in the way of detail and is relatively unsophisticated. But what it lacked in details and sophistication it made up for in its vision. In 1967, the County decided that the unincorporated area was to be largely dominated by agricultural land uses to the west, timberlands to the east, rural residential land uses throughout the foothills ([Figure 2-1](#)). The plan also recognized the existing unincorporated communities throughout Placer County and provided reasonable opportunities for economic development activities to occur in these areas. The 1967 General Plan essentially concluded that significant levels of urban development are to occur in the Cities of Placer County, Colfax, Auburn, Roseville, Rocklin and Lincoln (The Town of Loomis was not incorporated at the time the General Plan was adopted.) The vision depicted in that General Plan essentially has held true for some 33 years. Since 1967, the majority of changes in Placer County have taken place in the Cities of Placer County and to a lesser extent, unincorporated areas in Granite Bay, Martis Valley and North Auburn.

Placer County has been witness to significant changes since 1967. When the first General Plan was adopted, the entire population of the County was approximately 77,000 persons, almost exactly the population of Roseville in 2000. Since 1940, we have almost doubled our population every 20 years. Even though this growth rate is expected to slow some in the next couple of decades, it is still projected that the County population will more than double in the next 40 years. [Figure 2-2](#) depicts the population of Placer County from 1960 to 2000.

SECTION B: Existing Population

According to SACOG, the 2000 population of Placer County reached 230,060 persons, an increase of 158,000 persons over the 1967 population. The majority of the population resides in the cities of Placer County but the unincorporated area continues to have the largest population under a single governmental entity.

The population is split between unincorporated and incorporated areas as depicted in [Figure 2-3](#).

Maps 5 and 6, Existing Land Use in Western and Eastern Placer County, depict the extent of urban development in Placer County as of 1998. Although these figures do not depict all of the developed land uses in Placer County, they do depict the location of urban land uses or those which have resulted in the greatest amount of change upon the natural landscape. As evidenced in the maps, the majority of changes have occurred in South Placer near Interstate 80 and State Route 65 in the communities of Roseville, Rocklin and Lincoln. In the foothills, the communities of Auburn, Foresthill and Colfax provide some amount of urban development. In the east, the Martis Valley, Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows and areas near the shores of Lake Tahoe provide additional pockets of urban development.

SECTION C: Population Projections

As mentioned in the previous section, Placer County is expected to receive a significant amount of growth in the next few decades. This determination is based upon a review of population and employment projections for Placer County and the region. Numerous agencies and entities provide these population projections. The Sacramento Area Council of Governments and the State Department of Finance provide two of the most frequently evaluated projections for this region. These projections are based upon a variety of trends and statistics as well as the land uses depicted on the general plans of the County and the Cities.

Map 7 (General Plan for County and Cities) depicts, in simplified form, all of the land uses depicted on the Placer County General Plan, community plans and the General Plans of the Cities of Placer County. (Maps 8 and 9 depict the General Plan Designations with a higher degree of specificity.) The growth that is anticipated between now and a future buildout date will be accommodated in the areas depicted on this figure. Amendments to general plans occur in all of the jurisdictions of Placer County over time. They can be initiated by individual landowners or by the jurisdiction. They can affect a single parcel of land or they can apply throughout the boundaries of the jurisdiction. Therefore, the land uses depicted on Map 7 should be viewed as the theoretical buildout condition as depicted on general plans in the year 2000. Future amendments will change the form of development over time.

The land uses depicted on this figure include the following:

Urban - 94,066 acres (Residential at a density greater than 1 dwelling unit/acre, commercial, industrial and professional)

Rural Residential – 113,929 acres (Residential at a density of 1 dwelling unit/acre to 1 dwelling unit/10 acres)

Agricultural – 134,339 acres (Residential densities at no greater than 1 dwelling unit/10 acres)

Open Space - 36,502 acres (Includes parks, recreational areas, riparian corridors, flood plains and other similar protected areas)

Timber – 517,278 acres (Residential densities at no greater than 1 dwelling unit/10 acres)

Figure 2-4 depicts the anticipated changes, by jurisdiction between 2000 and 2040 as projected by the State Department of Finance. The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)

has calculated that the collective General Plans in Placer County (cities and County) would account for approximately 570,000 persons at a theoretical buildout at some point of time in the future (post-2040 for residential). Therefore, one can conclude that there are ample opportunities to accommodate economic growth as well as the conservation goals of this program without competing for land as a finite resource.

A number of factors could change projections over time including changes in demographics, economic development trends, infrastructure constraints, or changes in general plans. Nevertheless, the data does show significant opportunities for growth in Placer County for many years to come. For purposes of this program it also shows that there are significant opportunities to conserve a wide range of open space and agricultural resources.

SECTION D: Economic Development Trends

In 1997 the County prepared an economic development profile that examined the various factors that affect economic development activities in Placer County. A summary of the findings of this report point to continued and rapid growth in the county for years to come. This economic growth, given the trends in real estate in particular, will alter the landscape of Placer County.

Between 1983 and 1996, the fastest growing employment sectors in Placer County were services, trade, and manufacturing. Mining remained fairly stable while there was some loss of jobs in transportation and public utilities. By 2000, the percent change in employment growth narrowed. Manufacturing added the most jobs. As the manufacturing sector grows and matures, other sectors are gaining momentum and continue to diversify the Placer County economy.

Computer and technology support firms are among the most rapidly expanding businesses in the area. Today, data processing, accounting, law, lobbying, and engineering firms, as well as state associations serve San Francisco Bay Area and Southern California clients from Placer County, keeping labor and living costs down while offering a high quality of life. Consequently, the mix of companies in Placer County has become more regional and national in character.

Several factors make a significant contribution to the real estate activity in the Placer County regional marketplace. One factor is that business expenses are substantially lower than in San Francisco Bay Area or in Southern California. Commercial rents are generally lower in the region than in other selected cities. In combination with lower labor costs, lower commercial rents are an incentive to companies relocating to the area.

The comparatively low cost of housing in Placer County attracts many new residents to the region. Californians migrate from the more expensive areas of the state to Placer County to seek jobs or retire. Because of its proximity to executive housing, as well as affordable housing, good school systems and excellent infrastructure, the Roseville/Rocklin area continues to attract corporate and professional services tenants. With available land, Roseville/Rocklin should continue to expand and develop as a professional and corporate location and experience low vacancy rates.

SECTION E: The Role of Placer Legacy

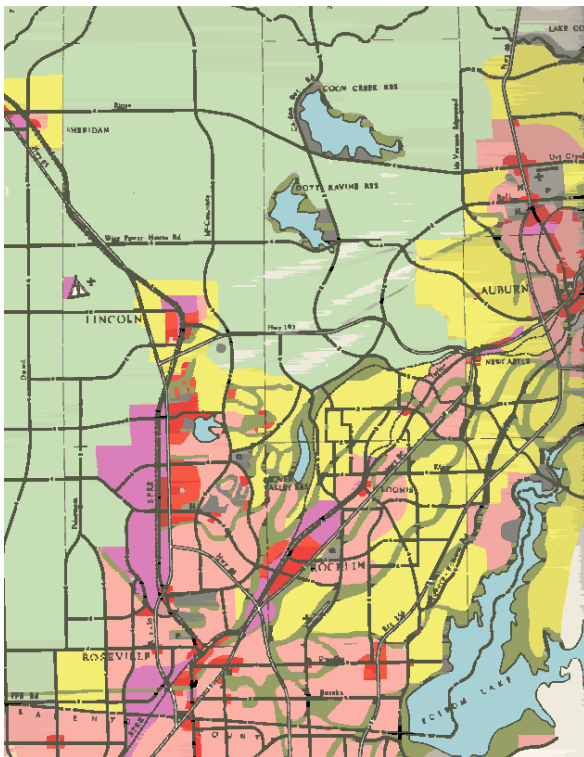
[Map 11](#) (Potential Urban and Rural Residential Growth) depicts where urban growth will occur at buildout when compared to the existing extent of urban development as of 1998. Lands outside of the urban land use boundary are designated for rural residential, open space, agriculture and timber. The last three land uses provide the majority of the "open" lands in Placer County today. [Map 11](#) shows that we are going to accommodate the increment of growth within a relatively compact urban core area—mostly in South Placer. The compact nature of the existing and future growth pattern provides the citizens of the county with the opportunity to insure that lands outside of the urban core area can be protected for the resource values they contain.

Current protection methods in the County are applied through General Plan policy language and land use ordinances such as the zoning, grading and flood damage prevention ordinances. The Cities of Placer County provide for similar levels of protection. For agricultural and timberlands, the Williamson Act and Timberland Preservation Zones provide some degree of protection but are not permanent protection tools. None of these tools provide a permanent method of protection. The Placer Legacy program is being developed to specifically provide permanent mechanisms to protect these resources ([Appendix C](#) provides a list of existing programs).

The SACOG buildout figure of 570,000 persons, when examined against the Department of Finance's projection for 522,000 persons in Placer County by the year 2040, shows that there is the potential to accommodate a significant level of economic development activity without having to amend the County and City general plans to accommodate these new residents and employers. This provides an opportunity to examine the current general plans and determine where open space and agricultural lands can be protected in perpetuity without having to reduce or eliminate opportunities for economic growth and expansion.

Figure 2-1. 1967 and 2000 General Plans in South Placer County***That Was Then.....***

Placer County General Plan in 1967



The 1967 General Plan in South Placer depicting urban development in the Roseville, Rocklin and Lincoln area. The areas in pink and red are urban residential and commercial and professional. Areas in purple are industrial, areas in yellow are rural residential, areas in light green are agricultural and areas in dark green are open space.

....and This is Now

Placer County General Plans 2000

A compilation of the Placer County General Plan Land Use Diagram and the General Plans land use diagrams of Auburn, Loomis, Lincoln, Rocklin and Roseville as of 2000. Areas in red are urban land uses including commercial, residential and professional. Areas in purple are industrial, yellow are rural residential, light green is agricultural and dark green is open space.

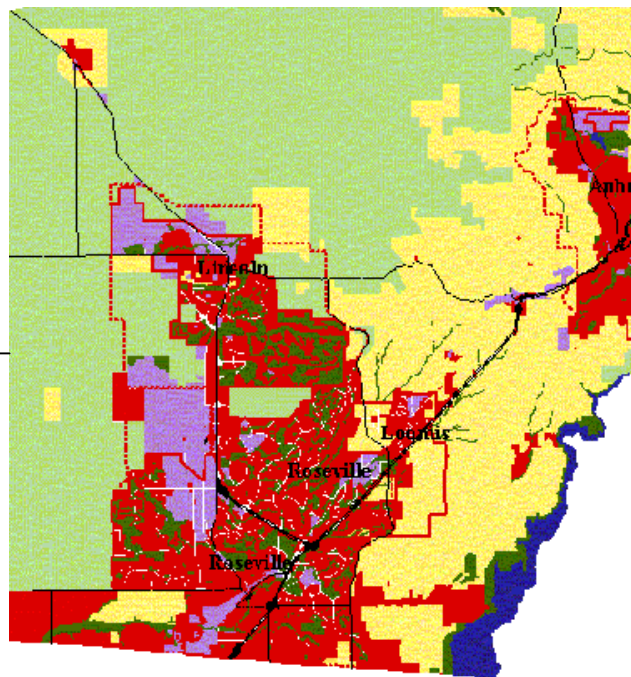


Figure 2-2. Placer County Population 1960-2000

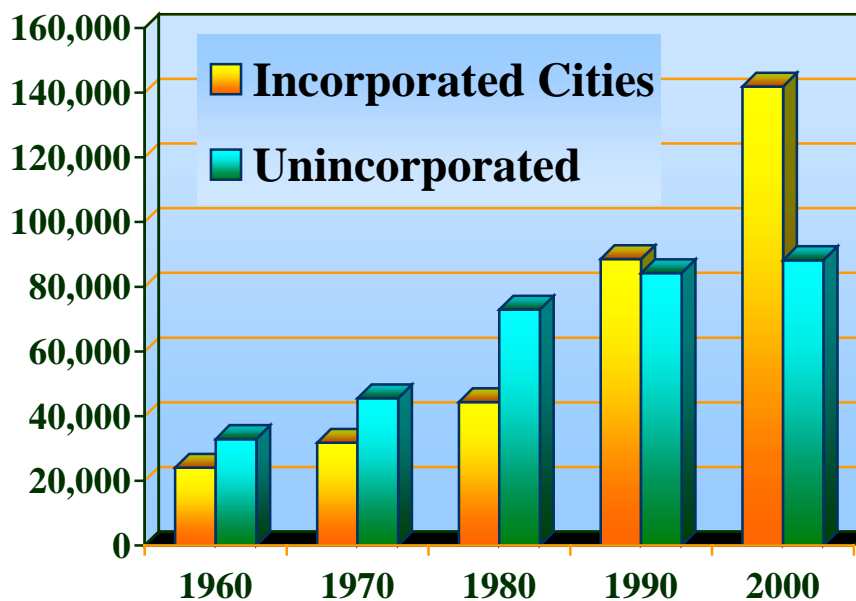


Figure 2-3. Placer County 2000 Population

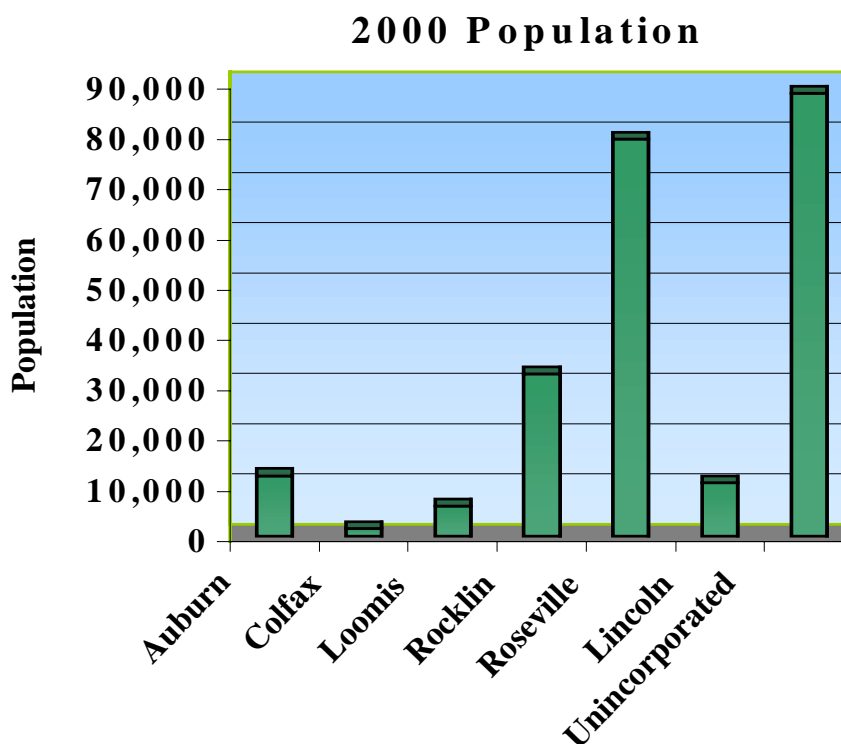


Figure 2-4. Department of Finance Projections For Placer County to 2040